

...SO WE ARE BLESSED!

by Rabbi Label Lam

So shall you bless the Children of Israel, saying to them, "May HASHEM bless you and protect you. May HASHEM shine His face toward you and be gracious to you. May HASHEM lift His face to you and grant you peace. (Bamidbar 6:23-26)

May HASHEM bless you: That your possessions should be blessed! (Rashi)

And protect you: So bandits should not attack you to take your money. (Rashi)

The Torah heralds this as the optimal blessing. "So shall you bless the Children of Israel..." As if to say, "This is how you do it!" Every day in Eretz Yisrael and on holidays here Cohanim stretch out their arms and rain upon the People of Israel these very words. Many parents on Friday Nights place their hands upon the heads of their children individually, and repeat the text of this self same blessing. Maybe the question can be asked, "This is how we should bless the Children of Israel?" According to Rashi it seems like a blessing for material well-being. In just a few short lines could we not have remained focused on loftier ideals?

The Mesilas Yesharim sets the existential stage thusly; "In truth man finds himself placed in the midst of a raging battle. All matters of this world, whether good or bad, are tests for him- poverty on one side and wealth on the other..." Poverty is a test! Wealth is a test! Which is a more difficult? It has been said that the test of wealth is even greater than the test of poverty, although, over the millennium so many have cried out in prayer, "Test me!"

The Chovos HaLevavos lists three reasons HASHEM may visit wealth upon a person. He offers three accompanying symptoms to indicate which of the three is active in a given situation.

1) Sometimes a person is made wealthy as a test. What are the symptoms this is so? "This person is more consumed with worries about how he is going to protect or increase his wealth and he is more fearful about whatever in the world might affect his financial portfolio for the worse than he is occupied with seeking ways to fulfill his obligations to his Creator. Therefore he has little real benefit or pleasure from the wealth." This poor fellow is paralyzed with continuous anxiety, riding the waves of varying economic prognostications.

2) A person is sometimes granted wealth for his benefit. The signal that this is the case is- that the recipient feels ever more grateful to his Creator and therefore his wealth is the catalyst for him to execute more and more Mitzvos. Perhaps he can afford to hire a manger and do more personal

learning. He has more time for his family and resources for the community!

3) The sign that wealth has been given as a punishment is that he is so busy indulging himself with pleasures he forgets about the gratitude he owes the Creator for his good fortune. Like the guy who won the lottery and started giving stock advice, his mind is muddled with delusions of grandeur and increasing appetites. His apparent success is ever more the reason for his unhappiness than anything else. The story of his life begins to feel like a longer version of the suicide note written by the Be- Knighted Brian Epstein - manager of the Beatles, "I have everything! I have nothing!"

Let's briefly examine the three parts of that ubiquitous Priestly Blessing:

- 1) The first part showers us with the wish for both wealth and a sense of security to counter the stultifying symptoms discussed in the first scenario.
- 2) The second part calls out for a face to face (penimios) relationship with HASHEM lending all the benefits of a reliable moral compass to be ever connected to the true source of good fortune-aligning with #2.
- 3) Correspondingly the third part seeks to install a mind of peace. If only the mass quantities from without do not destabilize the quality of harmony to be found within ... **so we are blessed!** Text Copyright © 2006 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).